

CATE'S PLAYWRITER'S ROOM

fall · 2026



Day One Packet

from Mr. Harvey

Michelle · Jin · Patrick

*Read what makes sense. Skip what doesn't. Bring questions. We'll find this
play together.*

Hey.

I'm Mr. Harvey.

Over the next six months, we're writing a play together. And in October, we're putting it up in front of an audience.

The math:

- **Three of you** (Michelle, Jin, Patrick) write the main parts. You'll act them too.
- **One more of our classmates** plays the fourth main role.
- **Five more from our class** fill out supporting roles.
- **Up to three other students** audition in for additional supporting roles.

That's our cast. Roughly twelve people on stage.

This isn't a class project. It's a real play.

Real movement. Real images. A message that an audience walks out of the theater still arguing about.

Here's the thing: I'm not going to hand you the play. I'll ask you a thousand questions instead. You'll find it.

That's how this room works.

REAL TALK

Some of this packet will feel like a lot.

Read what you need. Skip what you don't. Take notes in the margins.

Mess it up.

Whenever something doesn't click, ask me. That's the whole job.

— Mr. Harvey

Three rules.

Three things I won't budge on. Memorize them — we'll repeat them all year.



1. Process before plot.

Before you write a line, you decide HOW the three of you work together.

Most three-writer projects don't fail because the writing is bad. They fail because nobody decided who breaks ties.

We'll fix that on day one with a written pact.



2. Premise before pages.

Before you write scenes, you'll lock ONE sentence — the argument your play makes.

Until the three of you agree on that sentence, you can't co-write the play. Yet. We'll find it together.



3. Action before activity.

Drinking tea is activity.

Drinking tea slowly so the OTHER one has to break the silence — that's action.

Drama is action. We'll catch ourselves writing activity all the time. Just notice and rewrite.

Who we're writing for.

You're not writing into a void. You're writing for actual humans — most of them already in our class.

The cast

- **3 of you (the writers):** each play one of the main roles
- **1 more from our class:** plays the 4th main role
- **5 more from our class:** supporting roles
- **Up to 3 outside auditioners:** students from elsewhere who want in

That's about 12 people on stage. About 12 roles to write.

REAL TALK

Don't underestimate the 4th main role.

It's played by someone NOT in this room when you write it.

That distance is a gift: you can write them DANGEROUS. The antagonist. The catalyst. The wild card. The one who pushes everyone else.

Don't waste them on a soft role.

About the supporting roles

Five of these roles go to classmates. Up to three more might come from auditioners.

We'll decide together: are they 8 distinct individuals? Or a chorus? Or a hybrid?

This decision shapes the writing.

What this show needs to feel like.

Four words. Repeat them every week.



GORGEOUS

Make pictures the audience can't shake.

MOVEMENT

Tell the story with bodies, not just mouths.

MESSAGE

Give them something to argue about on the way home.

PROFESSIONAL

They should forget you're in high school.

The roadmap.

What we're doing, when. The deadlines are real. Everything else is moveable.

MONTH	WHAT	THE VIBE
MAY	Figure out what the play actually is.	Premise. Build all 4 leads. Decide our ensemble shape.
JUNE	Map every scene before we write it.	Outline + climax. Define every supporting role. Three movement beats.
JULY	Write the whole damn thing.	Speed > quality. Vomit draft. Get to the end.
AUGUST	Fix everything we wrote badly.	Read aloud. Cut. Rewrite. Subtext pass. Movement integration.
SEPTEMBER	Cast. Table read. Lock the script.	Auditions. Cast. Last tweaks. Then no more rewrites.
OCTOBER	Tech, dress, OPEN.	Trust the work. Eat snacks.

HEADS UP

Hard deadlines. These don't move:

- May 31 — premise + 4 character bone structures locked
- June 30 — full beat outline, climax included
- July 31 — vomit draft has a beginning, middle, end
- Aug 31 — audition-ready second draft
- Late October — opening night

The three books.

We're stealing tricks from three classic playwriting books. You don't have to read them. We'll use the useful parts.

- **Egri** — Why does this play exist? Who are these people?
- **Spencer** — How do scenes actually work? What's a play SHAPED like?
- **Ball** — Why does my play feel dead in the middle? How do I fix it?

Egri — premise + people

The Premise

Every play makes one argument. One sentence. Egri's formula:

Trait + Action = Resolution

Examples:

- "Ruthless ambition leads to its own destruction." — Macbeth
- "Great love defies even death." — Romeo & Juliet
- "Jealousy destroys itself and what it loves." — Othello

REAL TALK

"Love" is a topic. Not a premise.

"This play is about family" is a vibe. Not a premise.

A premise has to ARGUE something. Something has to LEAD TO something.

3D characters

Every character has three parts. Miss one and they're a sock puppet.

- **Body.** Age. Build. Voice. How they walk into a room.
- **World.** Class. Job. Family. Religion. Where they grew up.
- **Engine.** What they want. What's in their way. What they refuse to admit.

The pivotal character

In every play, one character refuses to let things settle. They keep pushing.

In OUR play — with 4 main characters — the pivotal character could be one of you OR your 4th lead. Often it's the 4th. (That's why the 4th lead is so powerful.)

Spencer — structure + scenes

Action vs. activity

This one will save your life.

- **Activity** = things characters do on stage
- **Action** = things characters do TO GET WHAT THEY WANT

If a character isn't trying to GET something, they're decorating.

The shape of a play

- **Inciting Incident.** The thing that kicks off the question.
- **The Event.** The central question your play answers.
- **The Climax.** The single moment when that question gets answered.

Counter-intuitive but true: we figure out the CLIMAX before we write the rest. Because the climax tells us what every other scene needs to do.

Vomit drafts

Permission to write badly.

Your first draft is going to suck. It's supposed to. We get the WHOLE play down on paper, ugly, fast, all the way through. Then we fix it.

You can't revise a blank page.

Ball — what makes scenes ALIVE

Trigger and Heap

Every action in a play has two parts:

- **Trigger** = an action that creates a new situation
- **Heap** = the new situation

That heap then becomes the NEXT trigger. Like dominoes.

Tiny example:

ANNA: I'm leaving him. ← *trigger*
MARCUS: When? ← *heap, then trigger*
ANNA: Tonight.
MARCUS: He doesn't know.
ANNA: He won't until he comes home.
MARCUS: I'll tell him. ← *BIG heap. now what?*

Each line creates a situation that demands the next line. Chain unbroken = working scene.

When a scene feels dead, it's almost always because somewhere a heap stopped becoming a trigger.

Forwards

Every scene should make the audience MORE curious about what's next.

Reading Backwards

In August, we'll walk the play backwards from the climax. Wherever you can't justify a moment, that's a plot hole.

Stasis & Intrusion

Before your play starts, the world is in some kind of equilibrium. We call that the STASIS.

Then something happens that breaks it. INTRUSION.

Your play is the working-out of what the intrusion did.

**If you can't describe the world before your play, you
don't know what your play is.**

The pact.

Three writers. One play. Six months.

This is where you decide how to work together. Before any of us writes a single scene.

REAL TALK

Most three-person creative projects don't fail because the work is bad.

They fail because nobody decided who breaks ties when people disagree.

So: decide now. While you still like each other.

Sit down with the three of you in one room. Fill this in together. Sign it. Tape it somewhere visible.

Section 1 — How are we writing this thing?

Pick ONE. Each model has trade-offs.

	Style	How it works	What's tricky
<input type="checkbox"/>	All Together	All three of you in one room, drafting live, on one document.	<i>Slow but the voice stays unified.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Divide & Conquer	Outline together. Then split scenes — each writes solo. Reconvene weekly.	<i>Fastest. Voices can drift.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Showrunner Style	One drafts each scene. The other two edit. Rotate by scene.	<i>Balanced. Slowest of the three.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Voice Split	Each writer "owns" their character's voice and writes those lines.	<i>Risky. Easy to end up with three monologues bolted together.</i>

We picked:

Section 2 — What do we do when we disagree?

Don't skip this section. You will disagree. Probably soon.

ASK MR. HARVEY

This is the section students MOST want to skip.

It's also the section that matters MOST.

I'll press you to actually decide here. Sorry in advance.

When we disagree about big-picture stuff (premise, structure), we decide by:

When we disagree about line-level stuff (dialogue, word choice), we decide by:

If we get totally stuck after [number of] rounds, we'll:

Our designated outside person to ask (NOT Mr. Harvey — a trusted friend or older student):

Section 3 — When are we doing this?

Be specific. "Sometimes" doesn't work.

We meet [days/times] every week:

We write solo [hours] per week minimum:

Pages are due to each other by [day/time]:

Our shared doc lives at:

Section 4 — Real talk: boundaries.

You're going to be writing parts you'll PERFORM. That can pull you into emotional territory you didn't plan to enter.

Talk about it now, while it's easy.

Stuff we're open to writing about:

Stuff we want to handle carefully or check in about first:

If a scene gets uncomfortable, our agreed signal to pause is:

Section 5 — Sign here.

By signing, you agree:

- You read this packet (or skimmed and brought questions).
- You'll come to every meeting prepared.
- You'll fight about the WORK, not about each other.
- You'll tell Mr. Harvey before you quietly check out. (No silent exits.)

Michelle:

Jin:

Patrick:

Date:

Worksheet — find your premise.

One sentence. The whole play argues it.

Trait + Action = Resolution

DON'T PANIC

Your first try will be too vague.

Your second try will be too specific.

Your fifth try will start to feel like the play.

Don't get attached to early drafts.

Step 1 — Each of you brings ONE.

Before you meet, each writer drafts one premise. Don't share before the meeting. Surprise each other.

Michelle's premise:

Jin's premise:

Patrick's premise:

Step 2 — Argue about them.

Sit with all three. Don't be polite. Which one is most ALIVE?

Our shared premise (draft 1, will be wrong):

Our shared premise (draft 2, sharper):

Our shared premise (final, signed):

Step 3 — Stress test.

- Can you point to a specific TRAIT word? (Not "love" — "reckless love" or "compromised love.")
- Is there a real ACTION? Something the trait DOES, not feels?
- Is there a RESOLUTION? An actual outcome, not "it's up to the audience."

HEADS UP

Three signs your premise isn't ready:

- It's a noun ("love," "family," "memory").
- It has no verb.

- You can't say it without adding "it's complicated."

Worksheet — before & after.

Before plotting, figure out what world your play is interrupting and who's interrupting it.

THE WORLD BEFORE (Stasis)

Describe the world right before your play starts. Be specific. Like you're walking us through a real place.

PRO TIP

The Stasis is almost never peaceful.

It's more like a dam holding back water. Calm on the surface. Pressure underneath.

THE THING THAT BREAKS IT (Intrusion)

Be specific. Not a feeling — an EVENT. Something the world cannot ignore.

WHERE WE ENTER (Point of Attack)

At what moment does the audience walk in? What's about to break in our opening scene?

WHO REFUSES TO LET IT GO (Pivotal Character)

Of the 4 leads — who keeps pushing? Who won't let things settle?

Often this is the 4th lead. Not always. That's the one not played by you.

ASK MR. HARVEY

If all four of you (you 3 + the 4th lead role) want to be the engine — that's a problem.

Drama needs ONE engine. The others can be brakes, friction,

opposition.

THE WORLD AFTER (New Stasis)

Optional now. Mandatory by June.

When the dust settles after the climax, what's the new normal?

Building Michelle's character.

This is the character YOU will play.

Fill it in like you're describing a real person. Not a fictional construct. Somebody you've known your whole life.

REAL TALK

Your character is NOT you.

They can share things with you. But they need to want things YOU don't want, fear things YOU don't fear, and lie to themselves about things YOU don't lie to yourself about.

Make them weirder than yourself. It'll make them more fun to play.

THE BODY

Be specific. "Tall" isn't specific. "Six-three, hunches when she sits, walks like she's used to ducking doorways" — that's specific.

Age, gender, identity:

Height, build, posture:

Health, scars, things their body has been through:

Voice (pitch, pace, accent, the way they say things):

How they move (energetic, deliberate, restless, still):

THE WORLD THEY'RE FROM

Where did this person come from? What's their soil?

Class, money situation:

Job (and how they feel about it):

Education / what they read or don't:

Family (parents, siblings, kids — and the relationship to each):

Religion / politics / what they believe about the world:

Their friends, their crowd, where they're at home:

Hobbies, pleasures, escapes:

THE ENGINE

This is the hardest one. Take your time. Don't be polite about your character.

PRO TIP

The most interesting characters want things they're EMBARRASSED to want.

"To be loved" is fine. "To be loved by the person who hurt them" is a play.

What they want most in the world (deeply, possibly shamefully):

What's in their way (and how they're maybe their own jailer):

What they're most afraid of:

What makes them snap:

What they believe about themselves:

What they refuse to admit about themselves:

In one sentence: their temperament:

THE BIG QUESTION

In one sentence: what is this character DOING throughout the entire play to get what they want?

Building Jin's character.

This is the character YOU will play.

Fill it in like you're describing a real person. Not a fictional construct. Somebody you've known your whole life.

REAL TALK

Your character is NOT you.

They can share things with you. But they need to want things YOU don't want, fear things YOU don't fear, and lie to themselves about things YOU don't lie to yourself about.

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THE BODY

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Age, gender, identity:

Height, build, posture:

Health, scars, things their body has been through:

Voice (pitch, pace, accent, the way they say things):

How they move (energetic, deliberate, restless, still):

THE WORLD THEY'RE FROM

Where did this person come from? What's their soil?

Class, money situation:

Job (and how they feel about it):

Education / what they read or don't:

Family (parents, siblings, kids — and the relationship to each):

Religion / politics / what they believe about the world:

Their friends, their crowd, where they're at home:

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What they're most afraid of:

What makes them snap:

What they believe about themselves:

What they refuse to admit about themselves:

In one sentence: their temperament:

THE BIG QUESTION

In one sentence: what is this character **DOING** throughout the entire play to get what they want?

Building Patrick's character.

This is the character YOU will play.

Fill it in like you're describing a real person. Not a fictional construct. Somebody you've known your whole life.

REAL TALK

Your character is NOT you.

They can share things with you. But they need to want things YOU don't want, fear things YOU don't fear, and lie to themselves about things YOU don't lie to yourself about.

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Health, scars, things their body has been through:

Voice (pitch, pace, accent, the way they say things):

How they move (energetic, deliberate, restless, still):

THE WORLD THEY'RE FROM

Where did this person come from? What's their soil?

Class, money situation:

Job (and how they feel about it):

Education / what they read or don't:

Family (parents, siblings, kids — and the relationship to each):

Religion / politics / what they believe about the world:

Their friends, their crowd, where they're at home:

Hobbies, pleasures, escapes:

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What they believe about themselves:

What they refuse to admit about themselves:

In one sentence: their temperament:

THE BIG QUESTION

In one sentence: what is this character DOING throughout the entire play to get what they want?

Building The 4th lead — played by someone else.

This is your 4th main character — played by someone NOT in this room. Fill it in like you're describing a real person. Not a fictional construct. Somebody you've known your whole life.

REAL TALK

This character is your secret weapon.

Because none of you have to play them, you can write them as the antagonist, the catalyst, the wild card.

They can be the engine of your play. Don't waste them on a soft role.

THE BODY

Be specific. "Tall" isn't specific. "Six-three, hunches when she sits, walks like she's used to ducking doorways" — that's specific.

Age, gender, identity:

Height, build, posture:

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THE BIG QUESTION

In one sentence: what is this character **DOING** throughout the entire play to get what they want?

Worksheet — designing the ensemble.

Five classmates plus up to three auditioners. About eight supporting roles. Before we outline, decide what KIND of ensemble you want.

SIT WITH THIS

Some questions to wonder about:

- Are your supporting characters distinct individuals, or aspects of a collective?
- When the ensemble is on stage but not speaking, what are they DOING?
- Can the ensemble move scenery? Embody memories? Become wind, crowds, ghosts?
- What's the visual language of your supporting cast — uniformed? individualized? symbolic?

STEP 1 — Pick your model

Mark the box that fits where your imagination is right now. (You can change later.)

	Model	What it looks like
<input type="checkbox"/>	Distinct individuals	Each supporting role is a specific named character with their own arc. Doubling is straightforward — costume / posture / voice changes. Naturalistic feel.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collective ensemble	Your supporting cast is a unit — a chorus, a community, a moving body. They shift identity scene to scene. Movement-heavy. Stylized.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hybrid (most likely)	Some clearly individual supporting characters AND moments where the ensemble functions as a unit. Most flexible.

	Model	What it looks like
		Most plays end up here.

STEP 2 — Sketch your supporting roles

Even rough. We'll refine in Phase 2.

For each role, name the FUNCTION (what does this character DO in the structure?):

- **Foil** — exists to highlight a quality of a lead by contrast
- **Catalyst** — triggers an event or accelerates the conflict
- **Witness** — sees something the audience needs to see
- **Obstacle** — blocks a lead's path
- **Mirror** — shows a lead something about themselves
- **Ensemble member** — part of the collective, no single function

Role 1 (working name + function):

Role 2:

Role 3:

Role 4:

Role 5:

Role 6:

Role 7:

Role 8:

HEADS UP

If any role's only function is "to fill out the cast," cut it or rebuild it.

Every role must do dramatic work.

Worksheet — movement & image.

This show needs to be GORGEOUS and MOVEMENT-DRIVEN. That starts now — even before you've written a scene.

THE OPENING IMAGE

Close your eyes.

The audience walks in. Lights up. What do they see?

Not the first line of dialogue. The first IMAGE.

THE CLOSING IMAGE

The play has just ended. The lights are about to fade.

What's the very last thing the audience sees?

PRO TIP

The closing image is the one your audience will remember forever.
Plays are remembered for their LAST IMAGES, not their last words.
Make this one count.

THREE MOVEMENT MOMENTS

Before you outline scenes, name three moments in your play where MOVEMENT — not dialogue — does the dramatic work.

These can be stylized choreographic beats, ensemble shifts, physical metaphors. They don't have to be dance. They have to be physical.

Movement moment 1:

Movement moment 2:

Movement moment 3:

THE MESSAGE

After the audience leaves the theater — what's the conversation they have on the way home?

What is your play arguing for? What's the world it's trying to create?

First watch assignment.

I'll assign one of these on Digital Theatre+. Watch with this packet open.

Movement-rich (closest to what we're building)

- **"The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time"** — Frantic Assembly's choreographic adaptation. Ensemble does extraordinary work.
- **Anything by Frantic Assembly** — masters of ensemble movement and physical storytelling.
- **Anything by Complicité** — devised theatre, ensemble work, visual invention.

Multi-protagonist (closer to your dramatic structure)

- **"Art" by Yasmina Reza** — three friends, three equal leads.
- **"The History Boys" by Alan Bennett** — ensemble around a strong center.
- **"Top Girls" by Caryl Churchill** — ensemble with doubled roles.

ASK MR. HARVEY

Watch this BEFORE your next session.

Do the questions below alone, before you talk to each other.

Bring your answers to the meeting. We'll compare them.

After watching, answer these (alone, in your own words):

1. In one sentence using [Trait + Action = Resolution] — what's this play's premise?

2. What was the world like before the play started? (The Stasis.)

3. What event broke that world? (The Intrusion.)

4. Who's the pivotal character? How do you know?

5. Pick ONE moment of MOVEMENT (not dialogue) that does dramatic work. What happens? Why does it land?

6. Pick ONE scene and trace its trigger/heap chain in three steps.

REAL TALK

If the three of you watch the same play and write three different

premises...

That's the lesson. Same thing's going to happen with YOUR play if we don't lock the premise.

Don't worry about getting it "right." Be SPECIFIC.

OK — that's the packet.

If you read all of this: thank you. You're ready for week one.

If you skimmed it: also fine. Bring the questions. We'll figure it out together.

Six months. Three writers. Twelve actors. One play.

Most theatre artists never write, cast, rehearse, AND perform an original full-length play of their own making.

By October, you will have.

TL;DR

Three rules: process before plot · premise before pages · action before activity.

Three books: Egri (premise + character) · Spencer (structure + action) · Ball (mechanics + revision).

Sign the pact. Decide tiebreakers BEFORE you fight.

4 leads (you 3 + 1 outside) and 8 supporting roles (5 from class + up to 3 auditioners).

This show needs to be: gorgeous, movement-driven, message-strong, professional.

You're discovering this play, not being handed it. Bring questions.

Reach me anytime — in class, in the chat, by email.

Now go to work.

— *Mr. Harvey*